

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AEC-05 OES-03

ACDA-05 IO-10 EB-07 FEA-01 /085 W

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R 190022Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4246

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 0804

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MNUC, TW

SUBJECT: CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF COMMENT ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

REF: STATE 033708 (NOTAL)

1. GENERAL LAI'S COMMENTS REFTEL WERE MADE AT ANNUAL MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE (MND) TEA PARTY FOR REPORTERS WHO COVER MND AND FOR FOREIGN NEWS MEDIA REPS IN TAIPEI. UPI REPORTER, MISS DIANE YING (YIN YUN-PENG 3009/0336/5338) WHO WROTE STORY REPORTED REFTEL TOLD EMBOFF THAT GENERAL LAI'S DENIAL THAT ROC WILL DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS WAS PROMPTED BY QUESTION FROM MRS MONA YEE (I MENG-LAN 0122/1125/5695) OF PAN ASIA PRESS (FAN YA SHE). ACCORDING TO MISS YING, AFTER THE QUESTION PERIOD AN MND PRESS OFFICER CIRCULATED AMONG REPORTERS AND IN A "FRIENDLY FASHION" SUGGESTED THEY NOT RPT NOT WRITE STORY ON GENERAL LAI'S REMARKS. HOWEVER, AFTER A TAIPEI EVENING CHINESE LANGUAGE-PAPER CARRIED REMARKS ALL OTHER REPORTERS
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FELT FREE TO WRITE STORIES. MOST PAPERS CARRIED STORY.

2. MISS YING TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE "RELIABLE SOURCES" WHO SAID TWIAN HAD "ENOUGH RESOURCES AND THE CAPABILITY OF PRODUCING NUCLEAR BOMBS" WAS ACTUALLY CHEN YU-CHING, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS AFFAIRS, KMT HEADQUARTERS. COMMENT WAS BASED ON A LENGTHY NEWS ARTICLE LATE LAST YEAR ON ROC SOURCED TO CHEN AND INCIDENTALLY MENTIONED ROC HAD SUCH CAPABILITY. (EMBASSY DOES NOT HAVE COPY OF ARTICLE.) MISSION BELIEVES CHEN'S STATEMENT IS INACCURATE AT THIS TIME.

3. PAN ASIA PRESS IS A TOKYO-BASED COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATION AND MRS. YEE SENDS CHINESE LANGUAGE HUMAN INTEREST ARTICLES AND PHOTOS TO SUBSCRIBERS. MISS YING COMMENTED THAT MRS YEE PROBABLY ASKED QUESTION OUT OF CURIOSITY SINCE SHE IS ACCUSTOMED TO READING FOREIGN PRESS SPECULATION (ALSO, AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON NUCLEAR POWER TECHNOLOGY HERE SPONSORED BY GROC HAD JUST CLOSED) AND THIS WAS A RARE CHANCE TO QUESTION GENERAL LAI. WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH MISS YING AND DO NOT BELIEVE THE QUESTION WAS PLANTED.

4. IN A SEPARATE COMMENT, THE ARTICLE ALSO REPORTED GENERAL LAI SAID ROC ARMED FORCES ARE "PROVIDING PROTECTION FOR OIL PROSPECTING ACTIVITIES IN TAIWAN STRAITS." REAR ADMIRAL WU CHENG (0702/6927) CHIEF, BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE, CHINESE NAVY HEADQUARTERS TOLD ALUSNA THE IMPLICATION THAT PROTECTION WAS ACTIVELY BEING PROVIDED TO OFFSHORE OIL EXPLORATION RIGS WAS INCORRECT. AT THIS TIME, THE CHINESE MILITARY DO NOT CONSIDER OIL DRILLING RIGS TO BE IN ANY DANGER AND THERE ARE NO PLANS TO ASSIGN AIR OR SEA FORCES TO PROTECT THESE SHIPS. RADM WU SAID HE BELIEVES LAI STATEMENT REFERS TO TIME WHEN OFFSHORE NATURAL GAS AND OIL FIELDS ARE IN PRODUCTION; AT THAT TIME GROC WILL PROTECT OFFSHORE PETROLEUM PRODUCTION AREAS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NUCLEAR WEAPONS, MILITARY PLANS, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TAIPEI00804
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750058-0431
From: TAIPEI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750230/aaaabaru.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STATE 033708
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2003 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <22 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF COMMENT ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS
TAGS: MNUC, TW, (LAI MING-TANG), (YING, DIANE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006